

Chapter 1

Recharging Yourself to Face the Challenge¹

I am very happy to have the opportunity today to talk about the issues facing on-the-job² graduate students. I'd like to begin not by talking about any particular major principle but by sharing with you my own experience as a working graduate student and the result of my studies, in the hope that this may serve to inspire and help you.

In preparing for this occasion, I wrote down an initial draft of my speech and showed it to my daughter, a third-year student at Peking University, to get her opinion. Before she read it, and not appreciating the decades of history between me and this school, she was a little skeptical that I should have anything to say. After reading the draft, however, she had changed her mind and was, in fact, a little upset that she felt unable to express herself as well. "Even when I do have some overwhelming feelings, why can I not write them down on paper like this?" she asked.

I thought about this for a minute before replying, "Because happy things happen to you one after another when you are at such a young age; you have so much happiness that you become inured to it. Also, your pen and your soul have not yet worked together long enough to create a good fit; only those who have experienced hardship are able to make them fit well. You are still in school, so of course you have not had the chance to experience different lifestyles and realize the sweetness of student life by comparison. You can see how cozy school is only when you have left it; and you only realize more profoundly the

2 ACCOUNTING WITH HEART

enormous role that school has in shaping people's minds if you return to campus after having been out there in society.”

She did not really say anything in response, and just kept nodding her head. It seemed like she had understood what I said, but at the same time had not fully understood it. Indeed, I'm not sure that anyone can fully understand what it's like unless they have experienced it for themselves.

PEKING UNIVERSITY: A DREAM SHARED BY FATHER AND DAUGHTER

I have been privileged to live in a time of unique opportunities. My youth was a period of great expectations yet extreme confusion, and Peking University was a dream I held close throughout this time. When I was a child, her name echoed in my ears. During the “Down to The Countryside” movement,³ I was given the post of team leader of a production crew. At that time, although I willingly accepted re-education through agricultural learning and made great efforts to understand the poor peasants with whom I worked, I also dreamed of one day being a student of Peking University. During the day, I would labor ardously and then in the evenings I would read tirelessly by the light of an oil lamp. I read popular books of the time such as the *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, the *History of Entrepreneurship*, *How the Steel was Tempered* and *The Gadfly*, and I also tried every way I could to get hold of books on history and politics.

After the re-establishment of college entrance examinations, I was more determined than ever to work hard in my studies and my aim was to study law or politics at Peking University. When filling out my preference for college admission in 1977, I put down just one name, that of Peking University. Disappointingly, I flunked the entrance exam and failed to be admitted. In 1978, after six months of further revision, believing in my heart that the honor of attending Peking University was reserved for those rare few with exceptional intelligence and not for an ordinary person like me, I applied for a place in Zhongnan University of Finance and Economics and was admitted. At that time, there were many great teachers at Zhongnan and, longing for education, I benefited greatly from what the school had to offer. However, despite all this, I still felt a sense of loss that I had been unable to get the grades necessary to fulfill my dream; it became a

Recharging Yourself to Face the Challenge 3

major regret that I held in the bottom of my heart for a long time. After graduating from Zhongnan in 1982, I took a position with the State and spent the next 20 years there. Over that time there were opportunities to apply to Peking University as a graduate student, but I missed out on them all: my workload and my frequent transfers to different posts combined to make my dream more remote than ever.

The turning point came thanks to my daughter. When she was still at junior high school we started to make plans for her future university education. I suggested to her that she view the campuses of all the major universities in and outside the capital, so that she could get a real feel for higher education establishments and become better informed in making her choice. The first school on the schedule was Peking University. Once there, my daughter was immediately swept away by the scenic views of the Yan Gardens and deeply inspired by the refined atmosphere of learning. From pure excitement, we forgot ourselves and, unexpectedly, spent all day there. Before leaving the campus she declared, "I am going to apply for admission to this university; we do not need to go and see any of the others!" In 2000, my daughter was in Year 1 of high school and really aware of the building pressure. But she never chose to quit. Perhaps it was because she wanted me to help share some of her burden, or perhaps it was to fulfill a dream that she knew I shared, that she suggested in all earnestness that I apply for a doctoral program at the University and that this would be a prerequisite for her own application to the school. Doing it for her and for myself, I clenched my teeth and agreed; my long buried dream returned to my heart.

After this, I started a grueling five months of preparation for the entrance examinations to compete with men and women more than 10 years younger. I would never have thought it before, but in this arena I found undiscovered energy and unlocked previously hidden potential.

At 6.30 PM one Friday in May 2000, after attending a Party Committee Meeting of my organization, I rushed to Peking University's Ziyuan Guest House to prepare for the entrance examinations, which began the following day. That night, I was up revising until two in the morning. I took a total of seven examinations between the Saturday and the following Tuesday. On Tuesday lunchtime I returned home, where my daughter had prepared the most delicious food for me. Faced with her respect and encouragement, my anxiety and fatigue after all those examinations completely dissipated.

4 ACCOUNTING WITH HEART

People say that you cannot study when you are over 40. When I received my letter of acceptance into the doctoral program of the College of Government Administration of Peking University, I had already turned 41.

September 6, 2000 was, I remember, a cool, refreshing autumn day and the sun was shining gloriously. Accompanied by my daughter, I intentionally entered Peking University from the stately West Gate. Walking through the campus past the inscribed door plates, the heroic lion sculptures, the marble pillars and the tall cedars, I had the feeling of being transported away, as if I was walking inside a beautiful painting. My path of missed opportunities, fortunate circumstances, bitter lessons and the reliving of joy all seemed to become distilled into a higher level of existence in the warmth and calm of the campus. My first profound sentiment as a student of the University was this: It is not that Peking University is a goal too high to attain; it is that our personal growth is limited by our mindset. What people are lacking is not an innate intellect and opportunities in life, but dreams and the perseverance to pursue them. People lack the awareness to admit their own failure and the courage to take a second chance. "If you can take in different concepts, there is no idea that you cannot appreciate; if you can arouse your ambition, there is nothing that you cannot achieve!"⁴

Even more fortunate, and something in which I take even more pride, is the fact that in 2002 my daughter was also admitted to the University through the high school examinations. The opportunity for father and daughter to be studying at the same school at the same time is certainly a wish rarely fulfilled! Whenever I think of this, I cannot help smiling. To be honest, I haven't stopped smiling since the day my daughter was admitted.

MOLDING AND CREATING: "THE COMPANY OF VIRTUOUS PERSONS ENHANCES THE INTELLECT"

If getting into Peking University was the result of my hard work, the spirit of challenging myself that was forged during my studies there was to be an unexpected and treasured gift of personal wealth, and something even more meaningful than the admission itself. I often regard those four years of studying as the Cambrian Period of my life. Just as in that crucial period changes in the external environment hastened evolution and a massive explosion of species, similarly the University's

Recharging Yourself to Face the Challenge 5

atmosphere, environment, customs and traditions provided the scope for a gathering of minds, clashes, fission and sublimation into unlimited possibilities for students hungry for knowledge.

Universities exist not just to gather young people who are quick in seeking knowledge and courageous in exploration, or more senior people with an encyclopedic knowledge, experience and a discerning approach to conduct research. Rather, their *raison d'être* is to maintain the connection between knowledge and real life in an active and energetic environment that can nurture imaginative thinking and innovation. Research, absorption and creation all call for intelligence, clear minds, heartfelt compassion, magnanimity, courage and dedication. Universities exist for these reasons and that is why these institutions have always played such a significant role in the evolution of human civilization. Peking University has played a strong role in promoting modernization and progress in China's modern history because of the uniform direction shared by her education philosophy, administrative approach, University spirit and cultural atmosphere. Professor Xie Mian of the University's Chinese Department once said something that, to me, captures the essence of the University:

This really is a sacred place. For decades, several generations of China's most excellent scholars have been nurtured here. Profound knowledge, brilliant wisdom and tireless and lofty, independent thought—all of this combines with conscientious and careful thinking, magnificent and upright character and integrity and a courageous fighting spirit. Surely such charisma is a spiritual synthesis.

After working for many years and then looking back to reflect on those words, I appreciate even more deeply the value of such perseverance, the importance of independent thought and how everlasting passions and loyalty can motivate progress in our work.

During my time at Peking University, I learned about the unique spirit and atmosphere of independent thought and liberal development. In 1919, the then president of the University, Fu Sinian, urged: "Do away with inherited scientific thought and introduce modern-age scientific thought; do away with subjective arbitrary thought and introduce objective skepticism; work for the future of society and not for the society of today." Zhang Zhongxing, an alumnus of Peking University, remembers: "Once inside the doors of Peking University there were intangible and unwritten supreme rules in governance; this is

6 ACCOUNTING WITH HEART

called an air for learning. One calls it an ambiance, because it has no sound or smell, but in fact it is very powerful.”⁵ The power of ambiance is not of enforcement but, rather, of potential awe. Insight, imagination, the ability to make judgments and the ability to appreciate, which a university student must possess, can only be nurtured in an atmosphere full of reason and sensitivity. Free of constraint, soaked in calm and ease, universities have their own landscape that has been there forever. After years of working, it was impossible that my thoughts had not become set in their ways or boxed in. Entering university at this point, I could feel all of these rigid constraints gradually melting away. It was like re-experiencing the energy of a fresh spring shower.

While studying at Peking University, I kept in my heart the upright and incorruptible character of my excellent professors, their experience in witnessing great changes in the world, their vast, encyclopedic knowledge and their conscientiousness and perseverance towards learning and teaching. The scientific methodology and the extensive knowledge of my tutor, Professor Wang Puqi, left a huge influence on me. I particularly remember his words, “The company of virtuous persons enhances one’s intellect.” Professor Wang gave me a great deal of guidance and advice with regard to the writing of my doctoral thesis and with respect to my work for the State, from which I greatly benefited. As for the other teachers, some brought new and interesting material to their subjects, enlivening the atmosphere; they were easy to approach and were highly motivational. Others presented original views and made complex theories more comprehensible. Some spoke with assurance, offering extensive citations, often accompanied by warm laughter, allowing us to gain more life experience in a relaxed and pleasant manner. Like a flame passing from branch to branch as it consumes the fuel, the words and actions of our teachers clearly expressed that the ideals and mission of universities do not simply relate to the nurturing of a group of intellectuals with diplomas: They are more about the passing of the torch of thought and convictions, a remolding and a spreading of a spirit, creating a kind of ambience that can enrich personal character, eliminate materialistic desire and enhance moral status.

What was memorable for me during this period was the clash and interaction of minds between students and how we expanded our horizons. Students “were able to encourage themselves with their own moral integrity”⁶ and place integrity above professional success. I benefited greatly from my interactions and communication with

Recharging Yourself to Face the Challenge 7

them. Henry Rosovsky, former Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Harvard University, once said, “At Harvard, I often hear people say students can learn more by learning from each other than they can directly from teachers . . . I see it as praise for a meticulously selected student population of great diversity and exceptional talent.”⁷ Like Harvard, Peking University has always attracted and gathered a student population with a fervent sense of mission and duty and countless people with noble aspirations to explore the truth about saving their country and people.

Confucius said: “In a group of three people, there is always something to learn” and on-the-job students, bathed in their social experiences, can be a treasure to their fellow students. Not only can they draw on each other’s business experiences, they can also enter into discussions about personal qualities and work styles. For example, Gao Pengcheng was a student at Peking University from his undergraduate days all the way through to his doctoral studies. This enabled him to see all problems from a theoretical angle and systematically elaborate on issues based on the principles of his academic knowledge. There were things that we could not describe or explain even at great length, but he could sum them up with just a single notion; sometimes he would make a situation instantly clear to us all by a theoretical explanation. Of course, he was also able to learn many examples and material from the real world from me and other on-the-job students and constantly enrich his own theoretical research.

The biggest reward, though, was learning the responsibility and passion to serve the country and its citizens. I worked diligently to confront my inner self; absorb new experiences and continually enrich myself; to embrace my work post and respect the profession and to carry out my duties to the best of my ability. As a civil servant, I understand that the duties I undertake relate to the image of the government, the reputation of the political power and the support of the masses. I strive to speak well and act with discretion in my work, to comply diligently with the administration and to perform my duties respectfully and with commitment. I focused more clearly on the better management of public finance through considering policies from a financial perspective and analyzing and determining matters of financial policy through practising the important philosophy laid out by the “Three Represents”⁸ and implementing the “scientific concept of development.”⁹ For this reason, I chose as the subject of my doctoral dissertation “The construction and expansion of the public finance

8 ACCOUNTING WITH HEART

sector in China's transformation period" in order to research the topic of finance as fully as possible within the context of public administration and political science.

I learned to consider China within the framework of an international structure. If we do not contemplate issues from an international perspective, and only perceive them with patriotic sentiment, I am afraid we will not bring about good results, and this may even lead to mistakes for the country. Over several years I have had the opportunity to make research trips to a number of countries, including the Philippines, South Africa, Egypt and Hungary, and have published a series of articles based on my studies.¹⁰

By continuously expanding my horizons and by repeatedly undertaking comparative research, I have been able to maintain my passion in studying and struggling for my country and this ensures that my work and my studies continue to grow and benefit each other.

For example, in 2003, when China was working to resolve the issue of export tax rebates, the tax rebate rate of certain IT products was reduced. Some IT manufacturers expressed their dissatisfaction and local governments reported back that several foreign investors in the IT industry wanted to withdraw their investments, which would have been unfavorable to local development. After making international comparisons, I suggested that we had to consider not just the lost profits (or the increased costs) of foreign manufacturers as a result of reducing the tax rebate, but that we should also consider the weight of the Chinese market for international companies. We had to compare the cost efficiency of the Chinese market with that of other markets. If the problem were considered from this perspective, it would very easy to see clearly whether the views of these IT manufacturers were reasonable.

In another example, through my research on tax revenue policies in relation to foreign parties, I came to the conclusion that not only do we need to consider the benefits for different populations within our country, we must also consider the benefits and policy direction for the State, as well as the political and economic benefits and background of other countries. Only then can policies be formulated that comply with international regulations and practices, but also serve to fully protect our country's interests and seek to find a balance in the demands of our different communities. From this basis these policies can be used to promote the cooperative development of an economic society.

Recharging Yourself to Face the Challenge 9

RETURN TO THE FURNACE: “REVIEW THE OLD TO LEARN THE NEW”¹¹

I worked for 20 years after graduating from university and then returned to school as an on-the-job doctoral student. Some believe that on-the-job studies are merely “gilding” for the student and profit for the school. Admittedly, there are some students who undertake such studies not to improve their cultural awareness, to renew and augment their knowledge or strengthen their work ability. Rather, they are simply looking to add a label to their title and to make themselves appear better on paper. I believe that the results depend on the attitude with which a person approaches studies. After four years of doctoral studies at Peking University, I believe more than ever in the need for a “return to the furnace to cast the steel” through further education.

As Comrade Mao Zedong suggested:

Those with book knowledge must develop in practical aspects; only then can they avoid stopping at the book level and avoid the errors of dogmatism. People with work experience must turn to theoretical aspects and study diligently; only then can they bring rationality and synthesis to their experience and ascend to the theoretical level; only then can they avoid the errors of empiricism.¹²

Studying should comply with the epistemology of dialectical materialism: practice, learn, practice again and learn more. This form of spiral ascendance in a never-ending revolving cycle becomes the process by which we understand the present, face the world, explore the future and constantly strive to surpass ourselves. Each cycle of practice and learning enables us to reach a higher state. “A person’s knowledge is like climbing a ladder; the view becomes wider with each step.”¹³ Because students lack practical experience during their initial university studies, most cannot fully understand the theoretical knowledge they memorize; in their work after they graduate, they may gain an abundance of social experience and face multitudes of problems but they are often unable to generalize or make advances in their theoretical knowledge. The main purpose of “returning to the furnace to cast the steel” is to review and combine practical experience, to study new theories and to resolve the difficulties faced at work. This makes it possible to turn the notion of “learn to” —which embraces the traditional idea of becoming skilled artisans

10 ACCOUNTING WITH HEART

with the adaptability to deal with problems of the here and now—into “can learn”—that is, studying for originality, enhancing the ability to discover and absorb new knowledge in order to anticipate and handle changes that will arise in the future.

In my experience, genuinely learning something and improving oneself through studying while working must be done in three ways:

- Firstly, establish the idea that study is work. Studying and working are not contradictory; in fact, they are complementary activities. It requires work to strengthen our studies and it requires studies to advance in our work. A good train of thought, a good method or a good decision is often generated and perfected through studying, whereas an answer to a question, a strategic direction or relevant knowledge is often produced and captured through work. Continuous studies whilst at work can produce new awareness and new understanding in our work; associating related work with studies can bring a deeper level of understanding to the content of our studies and allow it to sink in more quickly. For this reason, one must view studying as work when engaged in on-the-job studies; one should aim at improving the quality and level of one’s work, through self-evaluation and resolving major theoretical issues faced in the workplace.
- Secondly, establish the idea that studying is living. Studying is a high-standard, high-quality way of life; it is a self-regulating exercise that continuously improves our mental models; it is a physically and mentally joyful process to experience and embrace. Whilst engaged in on-the-job studies, students who are willing to learn will be provided with new opportunities. They have only to grasp and dedicate themselves to these opportunities, study industriously and excel as a student to attain the full essence and happiness that life has to offer.
- Thirdly, establish the idea that studying is a long-term mission. Some may be in a rush to be successful; they are impatient and hot-tempered, wanting to achieve everything in an instant. They are in such a hurry that they oversimplify and swallow the knowledge too quickly so that it is not properly digested. Self-improvement is not an instantaneous process; it takes concerted effort over time and through imperceptible

Recharging Yourself to Face the Challenge 11

influences; and sometimes it requires that you review the old to learn the new. Clearly, you will need to burn the midnight oil in order to pass an examination, but the ultimate test is how to improve on your overall quality and research skills, and how to generate originality.

Clearly, studying for a doctorate while working is a challenge that requires self-discipline and energy. As a middle-aged person entering this arena for learning, I experienced great pressure as well as happiness. In particular, being surrounded by the vigor of youth, I had an unprecedented sense of panic. I felt that I could not afford to be the slightest bit complacent, and instead kept my head down and forged ahead. My four years of receiving the torch from my teachers could be likened to the poet who “whilst often collecting the finest blossoms from the garden of literature . . . was able to see both near and far.”¹⁴ I could only hope to get a slight glimpse into the great depths of knowledge and wisdom in the fields of political and financial studies.

My studies at Peking University also provided me with further understanding of how to strengthen my innovation skills. Previously, I had always thought that such skills were a product of advancement in overall quality and the continual renewal and augmentation of knowledge. I had thought that it came from studying and constant learning. Gradually, I came to realize that innovation skills are also created by the requirements of work, stimulated by work duties and attitude towards work. Now, I was aware that these two criteria were insufficient and that innovation skills can also come from the results of interaction and the interaction of results. Consequently, not only did I throw even more energy into my studies and my work, but I also endeavored to closely combine the two. Not only did I actively combine my own knowledge, pay close attention to the key teachings of my professors and learn from books, but I also actively participated in mutual exchange and discussion with elite students in my class. In particular, when analyzing typical cases, teachers and students would express their own understanding of the matter based on their respective life experiences, which allowed me to see the case from all angles and many different perspectives. It seemed as if suddenly I was seeing “the real face of Lushan Mountain”¹⁵ from a greater height.

Additionally, my studies produced two effects: Firstly, it provided motivation to my daughter who, once admitted into Peking University,

12 ACCOUNTING WITH HEART

pursued her studies with the enthusiasm and energy of a high school third grader, not once relenting. Secondly, it motivated my colleagues. People who worked in the units under my responsibility witnessed that I used almost all my spare time outside of an already busy work life to study, and naturally many were spurred on to engage in their own renewal and augmentation of knowledge.

TO STUDY, ONE MUST UNDERSTAND THE METHOD OF INPUT AND OUTPUT

Anton Chekhov said, “Method is talent’s sister.” One could say that studying without researching one’s methods is studying without complete significance. China has a strong tradition of placing emphasis on being adept learners. Consider, for example, the lines:

The skillful learner, while the master seems indifferent, makes double the attainments of another, and ascribes the merit to the master. The unskillful learner, while the master is diligent with him, makes only half the attainments of another, and is dissatisfied with the master.¹⁶

During my studies I was deeply aware of the rare opportunity I had been granted but I was also aware that time was limited and that, in turn, made me keenly aware of the importance of methodology in studying.

During my studies, I mainly focused on the following study methods:

- **First, balance extensive reading and specialized study.** In my experience, you must have a systematic and connected grasp of the knowledge and theories related to your profession. Secondly, you must also be able to look at things from the reverse side and take a critical look at the accepted theories with a view to breaking through the limitations of the already known. In addition, you must adopt a position based on the synthesis of multiple disciplines to investigate knowledge and the trends of the problem being researched.

What counts as “specialization”? My understanding is that it is primarily to penetrate a subject through studying. “The methodology of studying is to learn in proper sequence in

Recharging Yourself to Face the Challenge 13

order to be proficient.”¹⁷ Secondly, you must draw on past experiences and lessons to reflect and reach conclusions at a higher level. You must do your utmost to seek extended meaning, to discover and to originate. Only if you couple specialization with erudition during the course of your studies will you achieve results that outweigh the effort.

- **Secondly, think more and refine your writing.** The great thinkers of the past tell us that “The path to learning is based on thought”¹⁸ and that “Learning without thinking is labor lost.”¹⁹ Only by reflecting on what you learn during your studies will you come to a deeper understanding and be able to absorb it in a way that enriches the body of your experience and knowledge.

However, the spark of thought can be transient and can be easily forgotten. For this reason, you need to make a record of the fruits of your thinking, constantly revising and refining them. Through a never-ending cycle of re-thinking and re-refinement, you can learn to extract the essence of learned knowledge and allow it to permeate the core of your being. Thinking without writing is akin to words without deeds; writing without refining is like giving up halfway through, or working on something halfheartedly. An important path to learning how to think lies in mastering correct methods of thinking. In my studies, I used to employ both divergent and convergent thinking. The former involves the use of the imagination to open up the train of thought to all directions, breaking through constraints to consider issues from multiple viewpoints to discover other, fresher, possible solutions, assumptions and methods. The latter method places an issue at the center and uses differing perspectives to analyze the ins and outs of the issue and to clear away the mist surrounding it and to unearth its true face.

For example, when considering the issue of debt, I underwent five learning stages: The harms of money lending; the benefits of money lending; the notion of higher short-term gain to the detriment of the long-term; higher gain and lower harm and conforming to trends; and discretionary approaches. During the whole thought process I made sure to note down every idea that came to me, as well as any questions raised by others, and then I set out to seek evidence and solutions, to consider the issues on a deeper level. After many revisions, the

14 ACCOUNTING WITH HEART

theory that I wrote about proactive financial policies was received positively by critics and has been the basis of further research as China continues its efforts towards preparing for financial policy adjustment.

- **Thirdly, focus and determination.** “When a gentleman learns, he hears with his ears, remembers in his heart, spreads it throughout his being and demonstrates it with his actions.”²⁰ Under the shock of the tidal wave of the market economy, some people have lost their way. Their desire to better themselves is less resolute; they wallow in self-indulgence and thoughtless gambling, becoming enthralled in a world of debauchery and corruption.

Studying is like attempting to scale new heights on a mountain: It takes passion, technique and a great deal of willpower. I use the word “focus” here to convey the need to eliminate outside temptation, to endure loneliness and to study diligently. “Determination” is the spirit of perseverance. You can’t afford to be half-hearted or impatient, rushing ahead looking for quick rewards. Undoubtedly, the pressures of work and family will dampen the natural enthusiasm and energy for studying; and the distractions of everyday life can often erode industriousness and willpower. My view is that, since you have chosen a remote destination, you must plough ahead through the wind and rain. Over the years, my method of snatching a little leisure in a busy life sustained my drive during my doctoral studies. When others were playing cards over the dinner table, I used my time to study, accumulating small achievements and enriching my life along the way.

- **Mastering the subject.** “To study well, one must understand the method of input and output; at the beginning, one must seek to take all in and at the end one must look to let all out.”²¹ In striving to master the subject, I took care to nurture and practise four abilities throughout the course of my studies. First was the ability to conclude and summarize, cutting out superfluous details to find the essential structure—the spine and skeleton—of the subject and expressing the connections found within complex content in a few precise words. A second, and related, ability was that of using the essential points to build a knowledge system that encapsulated the

Recharging Yourself to Face the Challenge 15

whole picture. Qi Baishi said that “In painting a bird, it takes 10 years to show its physical form and another 10 years to show its spiritual form.” In my experience, studying is a bit like this in that the third ability required is that of being able to work from individual cases to find the norm; to move from the concrete to the abstract and from the superficial to the essence; to extract general rules from specific instances. In this way, the barriers of the old concepts are removed, revealing new paths.

Fourth was the ability to analyze and solve problems. The ability to really grasp knowledge and make it useful was often largely related to writing frequently. Whilst studying, I would often write two types of small thesis. The first would be an elaboration of an existing view or perspective but in my own words. The other was a more creative approach, in that it involved editing, enriching and developing on previous ideas that people had had and slightly advancing on this knowledge in order to add, in some small way, to the general understanding of the matter at hand.

TACKLING KEY ISSUES: HEAVEN REWARDS THE DILIGENT

My doctoral studies were not all plain sailing; there were torrents and rocky waters too. My biggest challenge and most painful experiences were related to mastering English and completing my final dissertation. These challenges took me to the edge of exhaustion. However, when I eventually came through on the other side, I was rewarded with lasting benefits.

The difficulties I face as a student in my forties and not having basic English skills were even greater than I had imagined. No tricks were available to me by which I could become proficient at listening, speaking, reading and writing; my only weapon was a willingness to work at it doggedly. Every day after work I studied English by myself. Even when I had to work until 9 PM, I would remain behind to do my exercises before going home. For three and a half years I did not take a single weekend off. My fellow students set up a small English study group and would devote three half days at the weekend and one evening a week to studying English under the tuition of a fellow

16 ACCOUNTING WITH HEART

student. We kept up our English group for two years and most of the students managed to pass their English proficiency tests. Because I needed to ask for more time off than the others, my level was still quite poor, and I was still unable to pass the tests. For this reason, I asked an English graduate student from the Beijing Broadcasting Institute to be my home tutor for a year and a half, and she tutored me four times a week. No matter how late I had to work, she would always wait for me to finish so that we could have our lesson.

I remember one Friday evening during the preparations for an APEC Finance Ministers Meeting I accompanied leaders to check on the conference preparations in Suzhou and we remained busy there until 2 AM on Sunday. We had originally planned to take the morning off to rest and return to Beijing in the afternoon, but I got up at 4 AM and traveled to Shanghai where I could catch a 6 o'clock flight back to Beijing to attend my English lesson at Peking University. When I walked into the classroom looking as if I had not slept a wink, the teacher and my classmates gave me a standing ovation. I started to have presbyopia earlier than I should have because of my English studies. One of the reasons for this was that the type in the English books was too small and I used to joke that "all our English dictionaries and reference books were made for young people, the text is so small; it would be strange if I did not have presbyopia! No wonder people say you shouldn't study after 40!"

However, during the SARS outbreak, I suspended my English studies for over a year because of all sorts of abnormal pressures and increased workload. Not surprisingly, I lost a lot of what I had learned and I was extremely disappointed and hurt that I had not been able to keep it up. I made a resolution to give it one more go. I want to use this opportunity today to emphasize to you all that the critical part of studying English is to stay committed and to persevere over years if necessary.

Another huge trial for me was the writing of the final doctoral dissertation, the grand finale of a doctoral degree, and Peking University is well known for its demanding requirements in this regard. Writing a dissertation is akin to bearing a child, in that the process of labor is particularly painful. My dissertation underwent through three major revisions. Initially, I had chosen to write on the subject of government debt, starting from the Glorious Revolution in England all the way up to the hot topic of the day, which was the problem of the Chinese government's huge arrears in export tax rebate payments.

Recharging Yourself to Face the Challenge 17

After I submitted my proposal, caring professors pointed out to me that my chosen subject area was too politically sensitive and, in consideration of my standing, suggested that I carry out research in my field of work, rather than researching a theoretical topic. Abandoning my first choice, I then picked the “history and future of public finances” as my topic. In this, I planned to investigate the creation and evolution of the public finance system and to analyze its future direction. I was quite interested in history and liked researching historical issues, so I already had a foundation for my topic. I found it easy to write about the past but writing on present and future strategic development was more difficult. However, my professors thought that the comparisons of western and eastern public finance developments were too large for the dissertation and suggested that I should focus on the future trends of public finances. On this basis I set my dissertation topic as “The construction and expansion of the public finance sector of China in her transformation period.” During the anonymous evaluation of my dissertation, I was advised that I should strengthen and combine political and financial theories and use the theories on institutional change relevant in political science as a precursor and foundation to analyze issues of public finance. Subsequently, I made another large revision to my dissertation, striving to pinpoint the pulse of China’s economic and social development through integrating the overall trends within the rapidly changing economy and society and analyzing the major issues involved in the construction and future directions of a public finance sector. The dissertation described and discussed the key elements related to public finance in theoretical research, institutional research, mechanism research, policy research and research within an international context, and it finally passed the open defense stage.

As the Tang dynasty poet Du Fu (712–770) said, “A piece of writing lasts a thousand years, the gain and loss are known to the author’s heart.” I have many emotions and mixed feelings whilst reflecting on the experience of writing and revising my dissertation. I had always thought of myself as someone who enjoyed research and contemplation; my work has always been closely related to writing and most of the reports that I have written have been used as the framework and basic content of various policies. Though I would never dare underestimate what was involved, I did not think that writing a dissertation would present me with great difficulty. I did not realize that the process would be so complicated or that it would be so

18 ACCOUNTING WITH HEART

closely scrutinized. In the final notes of the dissertation, I expressed my gratitude to the professors who had given me so much assistance:

Their ideas and suggestions were as precious as gold. Their criticism and comments were things that I rarely encounter as an “official.” Not only were they extremely significant in the direction of the revisions and improvements made to my dissertation, but they have also provided a significant direction to my future work and studies.

It is certainly true that the great challenges presented by the process of researching and writing this work have enabled me to analyze problems more deeply, and have strengthened my ability to research financial strategy in relation to the political theory that I have learned. Now I understand that the emphasis placed on research by those at Peking University is not just the topic of a lesson, but is also excellent training in willpower and self-cultivation. I realize that the acquisition of knowledge is no easy task, but at the same time I realize the joy of being a scholar.

THERE IS NO END TO LEARNING AND WE SHOULD CHERISH TIME

In the time between the defense of my dissertation and the graduation ceremony, I took part in three events in quick succession. The first was a visit to the Ministry of Finance’s De Cai Kindergarten on Children’s Day to watch the children perform for the special holiday;²² the second was to take part in a memorial service; and the third was to participate in a special meeting on the issue of preserving Chairman Mao’s personal belongings in a Memorial Museum in Shaoshan. These events prompted to a greater appreciation of the words: “Time is a fleeting guest; a hundred years will pass in the blink of an eye.”²³ Life is so beautiful and yet so brief; what were we before we were born and what will we become after our death?

Life and death are unavoidable rules of nature and thus we should accept them calmly and face up to them; after all, a calm and peaceful mind is better than a sick and worried one. Given how fleeting and precious life is, I believe we must devote our limited time to work for society, to do our utmost to spread more material and

Recharging Yourself to Face the Challenge 19

spiritual wealth amongst others. We must allow the value of our own creativity to enrich each part of our lives and those of our family and friends, and make a greater contribution to the work of the motherland we love.

I remember reading a book titled *Tuesdays with Morrie*, which tells of an American sociologist, Professor Morrie Schwartz, who remained magnanimous and calm throughout his suffering from an incurable disease that was racking his body. In the last days of his life, this kind-hearted and wise old man would meet every Tuesday with a former pupil of his to discuss life issues. These meetings lasted for 14 weeks. He told his student, "For life to have real meaning, you must commit yourself to love, commit yourself to those around you . . . and give things to others that you ought to give."²⁴ I thought at the time: think how wonderful it would be if we started life old and became younger! At least we would not take as many wrong turns. Of course, this is impossible. So, how do we make up for this? After the three visits I spoke of earlier, I started to find an answer to this question. It is to consult more with others, reach more conclusions from lessons learned and contemplate problems more deeply! All of these depend upon studying diligently, reading more and thinking deeply.

There is an ancient saying: "Wisdom takes learning and learning therefore is knowledge."²⁵ Studying is a basic tool for human existence and social development. It is also an endless, lifelong pursuit that accompanies one through life. I have explained it before this way: Knowledge is less than learning, learning is less than thinking, thinking is less than creativity, one-time creativity is less than having core competitiveness, and lifelong learning is the source and driving force of a core competitiveness. Although different people will have differing interpretations of the meaning of lifelong learning, I believe that its root and nature can be grasped by the following essential points:

First, just as Xun Zi wrote in *On Learning*: "There is no end to learning." Any person who wishes to avoid aging in mind, becoming rigid in thought or losing their abilities must view study as an unending process and must not see it as something that can be achieved once and for all. You have to learn amid changes and growth throughout your life, in order to meet the challenges presented by new knowledge and new environments.

Confucius said that men of noble character must not restrict themselves to one special field of knowledge or skill but, instead,

20 ACCOUNTING WITH HEART

should learn many disciplines to a higher level and develop their whole being. Lifelong learning is not a simple concept of education or learning, but a type of social behavior and a particular way of life. It requires that society build comprehensive systems and mechanisms for lifelong learning to resolve the questions that people ask regarding what and how to study.

Third, that the emphasis should be on the student's self-motivation and autonomy. "One can only make an effort once one is aware of learning, and one can be expected to make progress in studies once one makes an effort."²⁶ The quality and results of a person's studies are determined by the attitude, methods and abilities he brings to bear. Having a real grasp of the benefits of lifelong learning is the only way to counter the ups and downs and the frustrations that are an integral part of the study process. For me, studying is an enjoyable pastime; so much so that I do not hesitate to use it as a reason to be excused from dinner engagements. Often, I am met with a response such as: "I just don't see the point of why you are still studying!" But if they don't get it, they don't get it. I find racking my brains over a particular problem much more interesting than having to find something to say, just for the sake of it, around the banquet table. Some of my friends who see me working day and night on my writing and not taking the holidays to rest caringly suggest that I find a better balance between work and leisure, and find more time to relax. They do not realize that, for me, writing—particularly the writing I do outside of work—is a way of letting off steam and a release; it is a way to relax and recharge myself.

There is an ancient Chinese proverb: "Learning is like rowing upstream; not to advance is to drop back." The philosophy contained in this proverb underscores the concept of lifelong learning today. It applies to whole units as well as to individuals. Based on my own ideas and learning results, I proposed a training program for my work unit comprising "self-reflection, learning from others and preparation for the future" aimed at the three levels of official postings within sections, divisions and departments. After it was accepted and put into place, the civil servants in our unit changed their approach towards training. Where training was once merely a duty, now they fall over each other to sign up and those preparing for promotion examinations wouldn't miss even half a day's training.

I believe that lifelong learning and scientific study are an important element of a nation's development. This view was reinforced at

Recharging Yourself to Face the Challenge 21

the Sixteenth Party Congress, where the strategic task of “forming a learning society where all citizens learn and lifelong learning is promoted” was put forward. The third plenary meeting of the Congress proposed the objectives to “build a modern education system for the people and systems for lifelong learning and to create a learning society.” In this spirit, the central leadership of the new government took the initiative and set an example. Between December 2002 and November 2004, the Political Bureau of the Central Committee organized a total of 16 collective study programs to promote the notion of a learning society, and gained wide-reaching public attention and praise. With the support of the Central Committee, the enthusiasm for studying was raised and sustained across the nation. We are right now in the midst of re-making an ancient country, with thousands of years of flourishing literature and generations of talent, into a new nation of learning. The profound scholarly nature of the Chinese people will allow us to move forward on a majestic path.

THE FUTURE: A MAN OF NOBLE CHARACTER FINDS STRENGTH WITHIN IN THE COURSE OF VICISSITUDES

Just as a person’s attitude can determine his life, so too can a nation’s spirit determine its prosperity or decline. An individual’s struggles and a nation’s prosperous development both require a positive, enthusiastic spirit, a tenacious and unyielding fighting spirit and an indefatigable spirit for learning. Mao Zedong’s heroic words of “confidently believing that man can live for two hundred years, and so can swim an accumulated length of three thousand miles” are truly a vivid portrayal of an indomitable resilience and untiring energy.

I believe that to be resilient and untiring, one must embrace the following four qualities:

First, we must struggle for advancement, working robustly and conscientiously. When discussing the way of political studies, *The Doctrine of Mean*²⁷ points out:

If someone can do one thing after learning one time, and I cannot do the same, then I will learn it a hundred times; if someone can do one thing after learning ten times, and I cannot do the same, then

22 ACCOUNTING WITH HEART

I will learn it a thousand times. If you can really follow this, idle can become bright and soft can become strong no matter how frail you are.

This sheds light on the struggle for advancement, the strength to recover from setbacks and an energetic and promising spirit. Thinking about this, I realized that, although there were many doctoral students and many government officials among my former classmates in university, there are actually very few officials who have gone on to further academic achievement. In the 20 years after graduation, what were they doing with their spare time outside of work? When they attained some success or faced difficulties, did they find a way to keep moving forward or did they simply give up?

Second, in order to keep up with the times, we must eliminate the old and establish the new. The world's development is progressing more rapidly with each passing day. If we stay bound by old conventions, allow ourselves to be stuck inside old wisdom, paint a fixed picture, do not reassess our surroundings, or if we just focus on our own professional success, treat doctoral studies as "gilding" and are not willing to exert real effort, study hard or instigate reform, then we will always fall behind others.

Looking back and comparing the essays I wrote before and after my doctoral studies, I can detect two major differences: My reasoning skills have got better and my ability to initiate ideas has been strengthened. Some of my friends have commented on the improvement, which I believe is because my essays are now more comprehensive, more direct and based more on my own reasoning to identify problems for myself, rather than simply expounding on other people's words and ideas.

There is another matter that I believe can well demonstrate the importance of innovation and that is the creation of accounting and auditing software assessment systems. In 1990, when I was Division Director for Division I of the Accounting Department, the marketplace for accounting and auditing software was a real mess, with so many bad products available along with the good. With the support of our leaders and with the assistance of our colleagues, we took on the much-needed task of preparing an evaluation of the quality and legality of accounting and auditing software to assist users in making their choice. We established an evaluation and administrative system for the commercialization of accounting and auditing software. The structure we

Recharging Yourself to Face the Challenge 23

put in place for the commercialization of the Chinese market for audit software remains in force to this day.

Third, we must remain independent in character and pursue justice. In his *Sorrow of Separation*, Qu Yuan wrote: “But since my heart did love such purity, I’d regret not a thousand deaths to die.” This steadfastness of character in pursuing justice and truth of which he spoke is still held in high regard today. When the new China was created it was poor and underdeveloped; to change this, people had to rely on their own strength and not depend on the support of others. Deng Xiaoping said, “China’s issues must be dealt with according to the Chinese people’s circumstances; they depend on the people’s own strength. Being self-reliant always has been, is and will be in the future a foothold of the Chinese nation’s pride, independence and pursuit of self-improvement.”²⁸

Only by establishing a strong autonomous consciousness will China be better able to protect its independence, dignity and interests. I believe that in order to be independent and to pursue justice, we must continuously study. Only with more knowledge will we be better equipped to make comparisons and judgments, come closer to knowing right from wrong and justice from injustice. Only people with great experience know that many situations cannot be judged simply by relying on emotion or past experience, and that relying on one theory, area of knowledge or skill also has great limitations. Only by synthesizing knowledge from multiple disciplines can we produce a more reliable identification of a problem.

Fourth, we need to display fortitude and to see things more philosophically. During his travels, Confucius encountered many obstacles but even when his own life was in danger, he stuck to his principles, demonstrating the unyielding spirit of doing the impossible. The poets tell us that “A person who experienced a hard life can achieve anything.”²⁹ My personal experience confirms this view. I was brought up by my paternal grandparents in the countryside during the time of the “Down to the Countryside” movement. The hardships experienced then taught me to accept and face up to the challenges and changes we encountered in life. They also made me learn to embrace and be passionate about my destiny, to enrich myself by rising above the commonplace. I often compare myself to my high school classmates. In my school, there were four classes at my level, with approximately 200 students. At the time, only I managed to be admitted into university. In the high school

24 ACCOUNTING WITH HEART

examinations of 1978, our county had about 2,500 students taking liberal arts examinations. I was ranked third with my results, but of the four enrolled undergraduate students only I scored well enough to get into a university outside the province. Now, I am the only one who is in Beijing working for the central government. What is the reason for this? I know that I am no more intelligent than others, but apart from luck and the assistance of others, maybe it is because I am more fond of studying and have such a love for learning that I was a bit more determined.

In July 2004 at the Peking University doctoral graduation ceremony, a Doctor of Laws gave an emotional speech that moved me deeply. She said that she had been pursuing her studies at the University for a decade, from being an undergraduate all the way through to her doctoral degree, and now was reluctant to have to make her departure from her alma mater. In the silence of the night, she said, she had walked slowly around the Nameless Lake, kneeled devoutly at the lakeside and kissed the earth that had given her sustenance for the past 10 years.

By the time my own diploma was handed out, I couldn't stop myself from giving the degree certificate a big kiss. The four years of my doctoral studies were momentary in the length of a lifetime. I often think that a person can live in the same place for so many years, and though familiar with every blade of grass and every tree, not be moved by it. There are other places, however, that create love at first sight, in which one can rapidly become absorbed, creating a strong sense of belonging, recognition and bonding, and to which one will stay faithful until the end.

“Today I am proud because of Peking University, tomorrow Peking University will be proud of me”. This is the slogan hung on all sides of the University campus; it expresses its aspirations for its future graduates and is a repeated encouragement for the students. I know that it is next to impossible to make Peking University proud of me, but all the same I am working hard to please the University and, at the very least, not to disappoint her. For this reason, the end of my student life at Peking University became the beginning of my new journey.

The Xiamen National Accounting Institute is also fertile soil for learning. You too will be able to paint fresher, more beautiful pictures. I wholeheartedly hope that you will all seize the opportunity to study diligently and turn your three years of study into a wider, more even path to your future and to provide a more stable and resilient foundation.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Edited version of the speech given at the Inaugural Ceremony of the First Program of Master of Professional Accounting (MPAcc), at Xiamen National Accounting Institute, March 25, 2005.
- 2 The phrase “on-the-job graduate students” is used to indicate graduate students who are studying for a postgraduate degree while in full-time employment.
- 3 Refers to the period in the late 1960s and early 1970s when educated urban youth went to work in the countryside or mountain areas in response to Chairman Mao Zedong’s call to be re-educated by peasants.
- 4 *Groaning Words* by Ming Lü Kun.
- 5 Zhang Zhongxing 1986, *Fu Xuan Suo Hua (Chatting while Basking in the Sun)*, Harbin: Heilongjiang People’s Press: 84.
- 6 Chen Pingyuan 1998, *Story of Old Peking University*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Cultural Press: 29.
- 7 Henry Rosovsky 1996, *American Campus Culture* (translated version by Xie Zong Xian *et al.*) Jinan: Shandong People’s Press: 82.
- 8 Shorthand for the call that the Communist Party of China (CPC) provides insight and leadership for economic and cultural progress, and commits itself to public good. Former CPC General Secretary Jiang Zemin, who was credited with its creation, literally admonished his comrades to “represent the development trend of China’s most advanced productive forces, the orientation of China’s most advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people.” The theory is the result of deliberations of the CPC’s third-generation leaders on legitimacy and Party-building. At the Sixteenth CPC National Congress in 2002, it was formally written into the Party Constitution.
- 9 The Scientific Development Concept is the current official guiding socio-economic ideology of the Communist Party of China incorporating sustainable development, social welfare, a person-centered society, increased democracy, and, ultimately, the creation of a harmonious society. It is lauded by the Chinese government as a successor and ideological extension to Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory and the “Three Represents.” Credit for the theory is given to current Chinese leader Hu Jintao and his administration, who took power in 2002. It is the newest brand added to the idea of socialism with Chinese characteristics ratified into the Communist Party of China’s constitution at the Seventeenth Party Congress in October 2007.
- 10 These include: “Resolutely implementing ‘The Three Represents’ and making great strides towards prosperity—sights and thoughts on a trip to the Philippines;” “Each generation produces its own talents—a thorough

26 ACCOUNTING WITH HEART

- analysis of how the world's powerful nations have flourished and their implications for China's development;" "White and Black—reflections from a visit to South Africa;" "Life and Death—reflections from a visit to Egypt;" and "Walls and Bridges—reflections from a visit to Hungary."
- 11 From the *Analects of Confucius* (551–497 BC).
 - 12 *Selected readings from the works of Mao Zedong*, Beijing: People's Press, 1986.
 - 13 *Collected Works of and Quotes from Lu Xiangshan*.
 - 14 Li E (1692–1752), *Notes on Song Poetry*.
 - 15 This is adapted from a line in a poem by Li Bai (701–762)—“He fails to see what Lushan Mountain really looks like because he is on the Mountain himself”— and means the truth about someone or something.
 - 16 *The Classic of Rites, Record on the Subject of Education*.
 - 17 From *Yang Zheng Yi Gui* (Rules handed down for properly educating children).
 - 18 Chao Yuezhi, *Chao Shi Ke Yu* (*Analects of previous people by Chao of Song Dynasty*).
 - 19 *The Analects of Confucius, On Governing*.
 - 20 Xun Zi, *On Learning*.
 - 21 Chen Shan, *Men Shi Yu*.
 - 22 June 1.
 - 23 Xu Hun: *Nan Xiang Ye Zuo, Yi Kai Yuan Chan Ding Er Dao Zhe* (*Sitting in a Pavilion in the Evening and Thinking about Buddhism*).
 - 24 Mitch Albom, *Tuesdays with Morrie*, translated by Wu Hong, Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Press, 1998.
 - 25 Wang Chong, *Lun Heng* (*Discourses Weighed in the Balance*).
 - 26 Zhang Zai, *Zheng Meng* (*Educating Children*), Chapter 8: *Zhong Zheng Pian* (Chapter of Honesty).
 - 27 This is one of the Four Books, part of the Confucian canonical scriptures. The composition of the text is attributed to the only grandson of Confucius. The purpose of the book is to demonstrate the usefulness of a golden way to gain perfect virtue. It focuses on the “way” (Tao) that is prescribed by a heavenly mandate to everyone. Following these heavenly instructions by learning and teaching will automatically result in a Confucian virtue.
 - 28 Deng Xiaoping, *Deng Xiaoping's collected essays (1975–82)*, Beijing People's Press, 1983: 72.
 - 29 Lü Benzong, *Shi You* (*Miscellanea about teachers and friends*).